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THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT AND THE PICKERING AIRPORT SITE

The Ontario government's involvement in the decision to build a second international airport at Pickering has, from the outset, been characterized by two basic concerns. One concern has been to make certain that the needs of air passengers travelling in and out of the Toronto region would be safely and conveniently cared for by whatever facilities might be build to supplement or replace the existing facilities at Malton. The other concern has been to make certain that such additional facilities would make the maximum possible contribution to the broader well-being of the Toronto-Centred Region, notably its rational and orderly growth and development.



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In arriving at the decision announced last March 2nd, the provincial and federal governments co-operated in a long and complex process which consisted basically of examining the broadest conceivable range of options, and then systematically narrowing these options, step by step, down to the final, most suitable choice.

As the main body of this paper will relate in greater detail, the decision-making process followed this sequence:

1. The need for additional air transportation facilities for the Toronto region was thoroughly established by federal studies initiated in the mid-1960's.

2. The federal government announced its decision to meet these needs by expanding Malton airport.

3. The federal government revoked this decision because such expansion would cause too much disruption of the surrounding community. Assured that Malton would not be expanded, the provincial government introduced certain land-use controls over the surrounding area, to ensure that its growth and development from then on would be compatible with Malton's operations.

4. A federal-provincial task force began searching for a site that would become the location of the major international airport serving Toronto.

5. The search was narrowed down from 59 sites to four sites, and the four were analysed in detail and compared with Malton.

6. Studying these analyses, the two governments decided that none of the four sites met the necessary criteria already laid down.

7. Consequently, the basic problem was reviewed, the original terms of reference were abandoned, and the task force began instead to search for a site to complement Malton in a two-airport or multi-airport system.

8. Within these new terms of reference, two "new" sites (Pickering and Beverly) were identified and carefully compared.

9. The Pickering site alone was found to satisfy all technical and other criteria, including the potential to further the objectives of the Toronto-Centred Region plan.

10. The choice of the Pickering site was announced simultaneously by the two governments.

This paper does not purport to relate the history of that decision in its entire detail. Rather, it is intended to complement and interpret the technical reports and other documents which were written at various stages of the decision-making process and which are also being tabled in the Legislature today.

Such interpretation is necessary to show the context in which each document was compiled, since no single document in this collection can be properly read on its own; nor do the documents, collectively, constitute the whole history of the project, since they do not include the policy decisions that carried the process from one step to the next.

Although this process was thorough and logical it was not one that lends itself to a tidy, sequential narration. Such were the complexities of the project that, in many points in time, several studies and processes were proceeding simultaneously and were having some influence on each other. For instance, while one provincial group was producing the proposals contained in "Design for Development: The Toronto-Centred Region", a separate provincial team concerned specifically with the location of a new airport was compiling a 1970 submission to the federal government. Each team, however, was aware of the other's findings, and the Toronto-Centred Region report influenced the content of the airport submission, even though that latter, as it happened, appeared a month before the former.

Because of many such simultaneous or overlapping studies, it would be a mistake to assume that the chronology of the project could be perceived simply from the dates on the accompanying documents. With that proviso in mind, however, the history of the airport decision, as supported by the accompanying documents, can be related as follows:

As a result of a study begun in 1966, the federal government announced in 1967 that it intended to expand Malton airport to meet the future air transportation needs of the Toronto area.

As studies proceeded with this expansion plan, Ontario planners became involved with certain technical aspects, as can be seen by a meeting summary dated November 19, 1968 (identified here as Document I) and an internal memorandum dated December 10, 1968 (Document II).

In December 1968, the federal government decided that the proposed major expansion of Malton airport to accommodate traffic to the mid-1980's and beyond was unacceptable, in view of the large-scale disruption that such expansion would cause. It was demonstrated that some 35,000 people were already affected by noise from flight operations and that the proposed expansion of Malton would subject an additional 35,000 people in existing residential communities to this noise.

Assured that Malton would not be expanded, the Ontario government introduced land-use controls in the noise area to make sure that any growth around the airport would be compatible with flight operations from Malton as it existed.

In announcing the controls, the Honourable W. Darcy McKeough, then Minister of Municipal Affairs, said in a public statement (Document III) that they represented "the first comprehensive attempt by any jurisdiction in North America to ensure that the utilization of lands in the vicinity of an airport would be compatible with the high noise levels generated by aircraft operations". Since these controls were announced, some 25,000 people have moved into areas which are not controlled and which would be affected by noise if Malton were expanded.

Soon after, a federal-provincial task force was formed to seek an alternative site as the major airport for Toronto, to be operative about 1980. Malton would be confined to handling its existing volume of traffic.

Federal experts initiated this search by identifying 59 sites within a 50-mile radius of Toronto. Purposely, it was a rough first list, designed to identify any site that could become a major six-runway airfield.

Next, the task force set about reducing this list to a few sites, eliminating the others on grounds of safety, operational considerations involving navigational aids, aircraft and air traffic control equipment, ground access problems, existing flight paths, weather, disturbance to heavily built-up urban areas, and so on.

By the process, the list was reduced to four sites:

Lake Simcoe, Lake Scugog, Campbellville (Guelph-Kitchener) and Orangeville, which were to be analysed in depth. As part of this analysis, the Ontario government commissioned a study entitled, "Regional Impact of a New International Airport for Toronto" (Document IV). Published in March, 1970 for internal government use, this report was the work of a consultant, Gerald Hodge, who had been commissioned by the government and had considerable support from the province's regional development staff in preparing the report.

The Hodge Report, like several that followed it, is too technical and too detailed for brief summary here. However, two significant points about it should be noted. First, Hodge forecast the annual flow of air passengers through Toronto would reach 54 million by the year 2000 (a figure roughly in line with the federal estimate). Experts from both governments agreed that this would be far too many passengers to be served by Malton's facilities, which were then handling 5.3 million per year.

Secondly, Hodge set out his views on the pros and cons of the four sites then under consideration as eventual replacements for Malton airport and rated Orangeville and Lake Scugog highest.

The Hodge study, combined with the findings of three other studies commissioned by the federal government, were summarized in a provincial document of April 1970 entitled, "Submission to the Government of Canada in Respect of the Location of the Second International Airport for the Toronto Region" (Document V).

As this report said, "None of these studies were (sic) required to provide conclusions or recommendations for any particular site but only to provide a detailed data analysis of each site's potential...."

The report, dated April, 1970, set out criteria designed to facilitate consideration of the options and to enable policy decisions to be made on the basis of comparisons between sites.

Using the four technical studies as the basis of its judgment, this report made these observations:

Costs to various levels of government: Lake Simcoe would involve by far the highest cost. Among the other three sites there would be "no significant difference".

Costs to users of the air terminal: Campbellville (i.e. Guelph-Kitchener) would cost considerably less than the others - to the extent of \$1 billion over 30 years.

Social, ecological and environmental disruption: Lake Simcoe would present "significant destructive influences" and would be "particularly harmful to the recreational potential of the Toronto region". There were "no significant differences" between the other three, though Cambellville (Guelph-Kitchener) was the poorest choice of these three.

Benefits to the region's long-range development: Lake Scugog and Orangeville sites were best. Campbellville had "some significant disadvantages".

This report, offering such evaluation rather than a firm recommendation, said that there had to be a tradeoff between alternative advantages and that the choice of site would depend on a policy decision on how much weight would be given to various criteria.

In mid-1970, federal-provincial discussions at the ministerial level intensified. From the federal point of view, none of the sites was technically excellent and some had significant drawbacks. Meanwhile, the Ontario government had misgivings about the same sites in relation to its Toronto-Centred Region plan. In its plan, entitled, "Design for Development: The Toronto-Centred Region", the Ontario government called for measures to encourage a relatively heavier increase in the population to the east of the city. Observing that "Malton will continue to exert an enormous influence on the shape of the region", the report added:

"The location of a new international airport to service southwestern Ontario would be of most crucial significance to the future spatial pattern of the Toronto-Centred Region. An airport will bring with it, into an immediate impact area, in excess of 120,000 people with public and private investment in excess of \$3 billion. Furthermore, since a new airport will require highly efficient transportation routes between itself and Malton, a new corridor for potential development will be created. The integrity of the development concept requires that a site be chosen which does not add such a powerful magnet for development in a location which conflicts with strategic components of the plan."

Because of the doubts being expressed about all four external sites, an internal review was taken in the Ontario government of the feasibility of having Malton handle all air traffic until the year 2000. Population estimates for the area were brought up to date (Document VI) and studies were conducted of the problems of expanding the airport ("Toronto Airport Location -- Proposed Malton Expansion" - Document VII) and of the associated question of providing sufficient ground transportation to serve the airport (Document VIII).

Within the limits of its own assumptions, the study on expansion of the airport appeared to offer a practical solution to the whole problem. It showed, to no one's

surprise, that expanding Malton would cost 35 to 65 per cent less than building a major six-runway airport at any of the other four potential sites. (The Pickering concept, far less expensive than those four other sites, had not yet been costed out.) "The savings in primary capital costs alone are \$400 million," the report said. It conceded that Malton would generate more ground traffic than could be handled by all highways then existing or planned, and that the highways still in the planning stage were at the practical limit of 16 lanes. However, the report suggested that the ground transportation problem could be solved by a system of mini-terminals away from the airport site. These could be connected to the airport by a rapid-transit system build especially for the purpose.

Conceding another set of major difficulties that expansion would bring about, the report noted that "the political history of the expansion of this site is such as to suggest that further encroachment on urban land, further increases in noise and air pollution and further risk of safety hazards is socially unacceptable in this area." (What it might have added was that by then the unrestricted area around Malton was even more densely built up than it had been when objections to expansion were voiced in 1968.)

To overcome these "socially unacceptable" difficulties, the report warned that stringent technical controls would be

needed to prevent any further spread of noise and air pollution, as well as "strong control of servicing and subdivision approvals" to hold the population down to existing target figures.

The report also conceded that expanding Malton would encourage the very population shift that the Toronto-Centred Region plan was designed to reverse; but it argued again, that strong government controls could restrain this trend.

Ontario government leaders read this report and decided that its proposition was based on too many risky assumptions. It assumed that a number of major untested and undeveloped technological advances in rapid transit, noise abatement and pollution control would all become practical realities by the time expansion was completed.

If that assumption proved wrong, thousands of people who had recently moved into the Malton area, on the assurance that the airport's adverse effects would not touch them, would suffer from noise and air pollution.

The report also assumed that the measures proposed by the Toronto-Centred Region plan could be modified drastically enough to overcome the added impetus for a population build-up west of the city.

Ontario government leaders looked hard at those assumptions and rejected the report's proposals.

Now the search for a solution to the airport problem had reached a point where none of the alternatives at hand were considered satisfactory.

It was therefore decided to review the issue and see what modifications might be considered. A Summary Report on Status of Airport Planning (Document IX) was prepared for the Ontario Cabinet and this outlined the following options:

1. Expand Malton only.
2. Build a major airport elsewhere and let Malton handle only the short-haul flights.
3. Expand Malton, purchase a landbank at one of the other sites and develop the latter into an airport only if Malton proves unable to contain its noise and air pollution.
4. Expand Malton and develop a system of regional airports with Malton having a central, long-haul role.
5. Close Malton in the early 1980's and meanwhile develop a new airport elsewhere.

The report recommended a combination of these alternatives involving a moderate expansion of Malton beyond the current Phase II, together with the development of a major eastern airport site as soon as possible.

The approval of this decision meant there was to be not just a single airport but a system of airports. The second airport, wherever it might be, did not have to meet the stringent requirements set out for the original four sites. The task force was then able to recommend consideration of two new sites: Beverly Township, in the southwestern sector of the region, and Pickering Township, in the northeast. Federal authorities looked at the new contenders and agreed that both were technically feasible for airport operations.

The selection of the two new sites developed logically from the studies of the previous three years, and from the new criteria. It was most desirable to pick sites that fitted into the regional transportation systems and were strategically placed to serve the market. None of the original four sites met these new requirements.

In addition, either of the two new sites would be less costly to build and less costly to use than any of the original four.

In October 1971, a provincial report entitled "Review of the Proposed Airport Sites E and F - Regional Development Plan" (Document X) evaluated the two sites according to the impact they would have on the Toronto-Centred Region.

It warned that, partly because of "the power of an airport to focus growth", selection of the Beverly site would "detract from the effectiveness of government measures to stimulate growth and services east of Toronto" and might cause problems of absorbing growth in the nearest cities.

The report suggested that if inauguration of a major western airport could not be prevented outright, it should at least be delayed until development east of Toronto had gained momentum.

The Pickering site, the report went on, "on the other hand partly satisfies the requirement for general economic stimulus in the eastern corridor, but falls short to an extent which may have the effect of stimulating growth in and adjacent to eastern Metropolitan Toronto, rather than in and near Oshawa, as desired".

The report also singled out noise and ground transportation as potential problems in Pickering. But in its summation, the report left no doubt that Pickering was considered by far the better choice for the airport site. In a numerical summary of the criteria considered vital, Pickering scored seven points to Beverly's four.

Meanwhile, a report called "Ground Transportation Review of Sites E and F" (Document XI) suggested that local

transportation problems at the southwestern site were not nearly so severe as at the northeastern site. However, the northeastern site, it said, provided the greatest capability for both highway and mass transit access. A major transportation facility for the southwestern corridor would be much more difficult to accommodate.

Environmentally, there were pluses and minuses on both sides, but not evenly so, as a report from the Ontario Department (now Ministry) of the Environment showed, in February 1972.

This report, entitled, "Proposed Toronto Airport II: Environmental Impact Study" (Document XII) only rated the Beverly Township site a more desirable choice for the airport on one count: the soil there is less fertile than in Pickering; hence soil damage in Beverly would be a less significant loss. But on 16 other environmental points, Pickering proved the better choice. Beverly's farms are more modern and successful than Pickering's - many of which are vacant or in need of repair. As far as the effects on drainage systems, water tables and water quality are concerned, Pickering would either suffer less - or have less to lose. The same is true of the impact on natural vegetation (Pickering has no natural woodlots; Beverly has), on fishing (many Pickering streams are posted against it anyway), on hunting (Pickering has no game animals to speak of) and on ecological inter-relationships (Pickering's are less complex, hence less susceptible to disruption).

With such strong environmental arguments going for it, and with the added prospect of giving the Toronto-Centred Region the right economic stimulation in the right place, Pickering became the choice - not just for the airport itself but also for an adjacent community for which the province now plans a population of 150,000 to 200,000.

Prior to the determination of the new Pickering airport, the Toronto-Centred Region plan called for development of a number of new communities in a northeastern tier paralleling the lakeshore. Cedarwood, Brock and Audley were proposed for developing starting in the 1980's. This growth strategy required transportation corridors, transit facilities, water, sewerage and other community services.

The development of an airport complementary to Malton, at the North Pickering site, will not create new unplanned urban development. The decision did require some modification of the original arrangement of the communities and some changes in the timing of services. North Pickering Community takes into consideration the possible runway alignments and the noise from the airport. The opportunity it provides is being taken to bring about a more exciting and attractive city. The new airport provides the stimulus for development in this area and at the same time assists in diminishing growth pressures west of Toronto.

These changes do not represent a departure from the growth strategy for the Toronto-Centred Region. The decision is a major step in its implementation.

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